

7 November 1962

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

SUBJECT: Executive Committee Meeting at the White House on
7 November 1962 at 1700

1. At the meeting were Secretary of State Rusk, Alexis Johnson, Mr. Ball, Secretary of Defense McNamara, Mr. Gilpatrick, General Taylor, Mr. McGeorge Bundy, Secretary Dillon, the Vice President, the Assistant to Robert Kennedy (whose name escapes me), myself, and several other hangers-on. As soon as the President had sat down I briefed him on The Crisis USSR/Cuba information as of 1500, 7 November 1962. I addressed myself only to the missile summary at the bottom of the first page and to the other minor items relative to the IL-28's. There was very little discussion as to the intelligence information and the President asked Mr. Gilpatrick how he had come along with his negotiations with the Soviets in New York. Mr. Gilpatrick indicated that the only problems still remaining were whether or not the helicopters would be allowed to hover over Soviet ships that were leaving and just how far the Soviets would remove the covers from the missiles that were deck loaded. It was generally agreed, apparently, that we did not have to have complete checkout of all equipment if our surveillance indicated that the missiles themselves were being removed. I had already given a fairly comprehensive briefing on the situation as regards missile removals and at about this time Mr. McNamara indicated that according to his information, 91% of all erectors were in port and about 75% of the IRBM rings were in port. I am afraid that I went out into left field here because I asked him 91% of what figure and 75% of what figure. His response was that these were the figures that we knew were in there and when I asked whether or not we actually knew them, he said these were the figures he had been given. There then evolved a discussion of the most recent photographs and apparently the President had not seen the troops actually mounting up the gangplank. At this point Mr. McNamara suggested that he provide pictures the following morning for the President to see, and the President turned to me and said, "Please have the CIA provide me the pictures of the most recent photography." I undertake to do so and would suggest that if the Executive Committee meeting is not until tomorrow evening, 8 November, we make an appointment to show the President the most current pictures. There then evolved a fairly complicated discussion of

NSC REVIEW
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6/26/2003

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- 2 -

just what the relationship was between the President and Khrushchev and it was decided that the exchange of messages over the 6th and 7th of November between Khrushchev and the President were to be kept very, very quiet and in general most any, if not all, of our responses for the next several days would be based entirely on whatever reply we might get from Khrushchev. The President indicated that he would like to make a press announcement quite soon, although Secretary Rusk said we needed more assurances and Mr. McNamara felt that we should announce sometime by Thursday evening that we were making inspections, particularly as to IL-28's. About this time Mr. Salinger felt that he had to press for a release of some kind tonight and although the President argued that tonight was not the night, he and SecDef and SecState finally agreed that a press release along the lines that "the Soviets had reported shipments of missiles leaving Cuba," and that we would expect some sort of U.S./Soviet meeting or contact later on to assure ourselves of this fact. After much discussion, a release was finally agreed on and I have not yet seen this. Mr. McNamara then pointed out that the radar activity with the FRUIT SET indicated more a factor of training rather than of any operational activity, and at this point General Taylor pointed out that the abort instructions applied only as to when the elements were fired on, that prior to being fired on our units would continue their surveillance. Mr. Rusk pointed out that we were heading for a real problem. He anticipated that sometime, perhaps about Saturday, the Soviets would ask for a Security Council meeting at which time they would say that they had complied with all of the agreements between Mr. Khrushchev and Mr. Kennedy and that so far as they knew, the U. S. had not yet complied with any of these agreements. Secretary Dillon then pointed out that while they might get the missiles out of Cuba, what were we doing about the elimination of Communism -- this was the main problem, not the removal of missiles. Secretary Rusk then said that U Thant had proposed that five Latin American Ambassadors who were still operational in Havana take on the job of inspection. The advantage here was, as far as Mr. Rusk could see, ~~was~~ of getting OAS back in the act and that we must at all costs insist upon complete freedom of travel of these Ambassadors for the inspection of any and all areas in Cuba, particularly to give us reassurances for the public against any possible uses of caves, etc. At about this point Mr. Bundy asked whether we were working for or against a bargain; in other words, are we trying to convince Khrushchev or the public of our good will, or vice versa; in other words, just exactly ^{what} are we trying to prove.

- 3 -

It was generally agreed that no definitive action of any kind be taken until we had at least heard from Khrushchev as to the reply to the President's message of 7 November. The President at this point indicated that we must insist upon the removal of the IL-28's, that we must receive good assurances of no possible re-entry of missiles or other offensive activities, and that it seemed to him that we now have some time to await further actions by the Soviets. It was at this point that I, General Carter, DDCI, pointed out that no matter what agreements might be made, it was absolutely mandatory that the United States Government must continue to have proper and adequate surveillance of exactly what was going on in Cuba. The President then directed that the State Department was to prepare a draft statement as to generally:

"1. Where are we as of tomorrow, assuming the missiles have been taken out.

"2. How must we maintain the initiative, because at the moment it would seem to be that Khrushchev looks pretty good.

"3. What other steps must we take in order to come along OK, and certainly we should wait for a Khrushchev reply before we make any public statement."

Rusk then interposed the problem as to how far we can press Khrushchev, not as to the IL-28's publicly because Khrushchev himself has not publicly committed himself on the IL-28's. About this point Ambassador Thompson indicated that we should play this very, very cautiously so that we did not box ourselves out, particularly as to the IL-28's. A subsequent discussion as to the FROG's, or short-range surface-to-surface missiles, indicated that as far as the U. S. Government was concerned, we did not consider them offensive missiles. There was then considerable discussion as to exactly what we should tell our UN delegation as to offensive and defensive missiles. Apparently in prior telegrams we have escalated or added on to our definition, and it was generally agreed that insofar as the U. S. Government was concerned, offensive missiles constituted the IRBM's, the MRBM's, the IL-28's, and anything involving nuclear warheads. Insofar as this might apply to air-to-surface rockets or to bombs, especially just plain ordinary hardware bombs, we would remain singularly quiet.

- 4 -

2. At about this point there was brought up the U Thant suggestion that the five Latin American Ambassadors who were still represented in Havana should perhaps provide the necessary inspection facilities for the United Nations. It was felt that the United Nations Secretary General should have the overall responsibility for inspecting each and every country, presumably on the basis of the Brazilian atom-free Latin American proposal, but that in any event the Secretary General should have the ultimate responsibility. This appears to be a Brazilian proposal with which I am not too familiar. At about this time Secretary Rusk indicated that Mr. Bundy should prepare a memo of our requirements as to surveillance, ultimate safeguards on the basis of quarantine or blockade, and as to just where we are headed for the reassurances that we need to make sure that Cuba is not a threat to the Western Hemisphere. It was indicated that if the Soviets would not guarantee our right to overfly, then we must tell them that we are prepared to continue overflights in any event, and that if we are shot at, we must take proper reprisal action, and we would hope, since the Soviets have assured us that these are Cuban instruments, that there would be no Soviets around to be hurt under the circumstances. At about this time Mr. Bundy pointed out that if we have any agreement with any five Ambassadors from Latin American countries, he would expect that they would immediately become spelunkers and not only watch outgoing ships but also start digging into caves. Mr. McNamara at this point suggested that if the IL-28's do not go under our previous ultimatums, that we should embargo their fuel. The President then pointed out that, or at least asked the question, "What can we do to make it so tough on Castro, particularly as regard the IL-28's, without getting Khrushchev upset or out of phase with his own government or without initiating a more fervent quarantine, what can we do to make it real tough on Castro?" There were suggestions of having Latin American countries breaking relations, Latin American countries keeping their ships out of trade, and it was decided that Defense, CIA, and State would get together and decide just what courses of action might be appropriate under the circumstances. The question was then raised as to just what should or could be done if one of our surveillance aircraft were shot down. Mr. Nitze pointed out that we should lay in a strong public relations program and at this point the President indicated that such a program might be included in the press statement that was being drafted for his use tomorrow.

General Taylor pointed out that we had a number of problems in case of a shoot-down of our surveillance aircraft. In other words, was the action isolated or general? If it was isolated, then we should retaliate on an isolated spot. If it was general, then we should retaliate generally. The point here being that we had to have further good proof as to just what had happened to one of our aircraft and subsequently either to wipe out the whole system or just that portion of the system that might have done the damage. It was then pointed out that we had no - repeat no - long-range surveillance target system. In other words, while all the discussion so far had been as to inspecting outgoing ships with missiles and checking incoming ships with possible missiles, quarantine action, and taking an occasional reading airborne, just exactly what were our long-range surveillance requirements? The President then indicated that he would like to have CIA and the Department of Defense establish a joint study as to just what we might need to insure that we would not again get ourselves trapped in a situation in which we had most currently found ourselves.

The problem then came up as to just what our posture might be if although telling Khrushchev that he had to get the IL-28s out, he did not do so, what do we do next? Do we go to the mat and make an international problem out of this, or do we deal with a situation which perhaps has not yet been met? In other words, do we go in and clean them out? Do we make this a public statement or a private statement? Just exactly what do we do in the event that Khrushchev says the IL-28s are not part of the bargain? This problem was turned over to State Department to come up with possible courses of action.

Mr. McNamara then pointed out that for tomorrow he recommended U-2 flights up to a total of five (and I think this is the entire capability) if the weather is okay and there are no other objections. He also recommended twelve low-level flights to include approximately eight against caves to just try to find out what was going on. The President approved all of these.

There was some discussion, but nothing substantive as to just what might happen if one of our aircraft were shot down. They apparently were not prepared to face up to this although I got the distinct impression that it was to be included in the possible press statement or possible public relations statement that State Department was preparing for the President for tomorrow evening's consideration. They discussed in only general detail Mr. Nitze's proposal as to what might be done if an aircraft were shot down. As you will recall, this included alerting the Soviets and the Cubans that if anything like this happened again, we would have to probably sit down and talk about it or do something else reasonably less drastic.

Neither Mr. Rusk, nor Mr. McNamara, nor General Taylor, nor myself, nor Mr. Dillon specifically were prepared to accept this. We all felt, and so expressed ourselves, that the President had made himself abundantly clear and that if there was any shoot-down or offensive action against our surveillance aircraft, action must be taken. Although no definite decision was made, I felt the real consensus that the hard-poking people at this particular meeting were prepared to go right in and start either shooting down aircraft, including IL-28s, or cleaning out surface-to-air missile sites in the event there was any hostile action against any of our reconnaissance activities. In other words, they did not - repeat did not - accept the general caveats that had been proposed by Mr. Nitze in his memorandum to the NSC Executive Committee, dated 7 November.

I must say that I was considerably encouraged by the general position taken by the President, Secretary Rusk, General Taylor, Mr. Johnson, specifically Mr. Bundy, and Mr. Dillon. I was not enchanted with the positions put forward generally by Mr. Nitze, and I think the rest of the party present was also not enchanted. I did get the most definite impression that the United States Government was not backing down from its prior position that all offensive missiles, to include IL-28s, must be removed from Cuba. However, there did not appear to be any real facing up to the problem of the SA-2 or the surface-to-air missile sites remaining in Cuba, regardless of who might control them, either the Soviets or the Cubans. I tried to address myself to this problem but was told by the President that they were aware of it. Unfortunately, it would appear that we are liable to be faced with the problem of accepting SA-2 missile sites all around Cuba without any firm decision as to U.S. surveillance capabilities or public policy, or Governmental policy perhaps, as to continuing this surveillance. In other words, I have a very real fear that some how we are liable to be backed into the corner of having the SA-2 sites remain in Cuba, and we, the U. S. Government, will back down on the need for continued surveillance. I repeated a number of times to the Executive Committee that unless we continued proper air surveillance we would be absolutely blind, dumb, and deaf as to what would be going on in Cuba, and under no circumstances could we accept a degradation of our surveillance responsibilities. I feel reasonably certain that the policy makers are aware of the fact that: First, as long as the SA-2 missile sites encircle Cuba, there is a very real threat to our surveillance and intelligence capabilities; second, that the SA-2 missile system around Cuba is totally controlled, operated, and commanded by the Soviet Union; thirdly, that if the Soviets should say this is not true and these are Cuban missile systems, then we should make it abundantly clear to them that in the event any of our aircraft are attacked or otherwise disturbed, then we must quite obviously take reprisal action and we would be happy that there would be no Soviet troops or personnel involved; and, finally, that the general

- 7 -

Governmental position was that so long as there was inadequate inspection on site, inadequate inspection of Cuba from the air, inadequate verification of outgoing ships, and inadequate checking of ships coming in to Cuba, then the United States could in no way be complacent, and would certainly be obliged to take whatever unilateral action might be required to protect its own interest and the interest of all Latin American countries in the Western Hemisphere. Contrary to most meetings I have attended recently at this level, I came away somewhat encouraged, and certainly not discouraged, but in a position of continuing to carry the flag for adequate intelligence and adequate policy action. I felt no feeling of hesitancy, no feeling of backing up, no feeling of caution from the President, or any of his advisors. There is absolutely no question in my mind but what we have a very firm stand, a very firm position, and that the United States Government will proceed forthwith along this line regardless of what the consequences might be. I was most encouraged.



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